

HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS IN COMPETITION: INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The conventional methods of teaching English as a second language have proved to be inadequate especially in India. The one way communication set up of the classroom fails in charging the learner with any urge for speaking the second language like the first language that is acquired naturally in the social milieu. Moreover, language acquisition takes place out of human need of expression not by force and imposition. The main challenge in Teaching of English as a second language (TESL) is by and large the creation of the right kind of acquisition rich classroom environment. It is the step-by-step natural and need-based acquisition process of the First Language (FL) that imparts the ease and spontaneity in the language use. If we can create the same need based learning environment in the classroom, it would be possible to develop the same level of competence and spontaneity in Second Language (SL) too. This paper tries to find innovative methods of developing acquisition rich classroom environment for English language teaching in the second language/ foreign language context with particular reference to the Indian education system.

KEYWORDS: Acquisition Rich Environment, Heterogeneous Groups, Need-Based Learning, TESL

INTRODUCTION

The history of Language teaching has witnessed an era of methodical practices. In the words of Rogers, it has been an 'Age of Methods' (Rogers, 2000, p.1) [20]. The language teachers have been shifting from one method to the other, from grammar translation to the direct method, and then to alternative methods. But these shifts have not resulted into a complete success so far. Then, as Freeman & Richards remark, came the era of paradigm change in teaching learning system: the shift from teacher to learner, from outside feeding theories to inside ones, from method-based top-down to teacher-based bottom-up approaches. This resulted into a transition phase in second language teaching: the anti-method movement from beyond methods to teachers' sense of tenability and finally to post method era. The postmodern theories believe that language teaching must be inclined to be nourished from internal sources instead of external sources. Internalization means more focus on learner's purposeful behavior of learning and self-initiation in heuristic learning.

PURPORT

The conventional role of a Teacher of English has always been very dominant, perhaps because of the hypothesis that the teacher is the focal point of all knowledge. The student, in contrast, has always been viewed as a passive receiver of the knowledge imparted by the teacher. The teacher used to endure the burden of the whole class alone and the learner merely took note of what the teacher said and sometimes responded to the teacher's instructions. In this paper there is an attempt to develop a novel approach to teaching of English as a second language, which allows learners to play a fuller, more active and participatory role in their language study, by crossbreeding two existing theories:

- **The Humanistic Approaches to Language Teaching** which emphasizes on giving equal attention to both the intellectual and the emotional development of the learner.
- **Communicative Language Teaching** which was a result of the desire to make language teaching more flexible and more responsive to students' real world communicative needs

Acquisition Rich Language Learning Environment

“Teaching, however purposeful, cannot automatically lead to learning for the simple reason that learning is primarily a personal construct controlled by the individual learner”.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) (p. 44)

There are different needs for which learners start learning a language. All learners do not learn English for the same purpose. One important thing that needs to be understood is that however much teachers teach, they do not have any real control over a learner's natural process of acquiring a second or a foreign language and achieving communicative ability in it, as it is entirely a need based psychological process and requires deliberate involvement of the learners without any inhibitions. Therefore, for the best language acquisition to take place, the teacher must create an acquisition rich classroom environment that is favorable to language learning. The communicative skills of the learners can be enriched if they are motivated to participate in cooperative activities leaving behind all their fears of making mistakes or being laughed at. Hence, teachers should assist this process by generating diverse communicative activities, especially intended for collaborative work, that are challenging to the learners and require group participation for their successful conduction.

This paper proposes the following innovative model for developing an acquisition rich classroom environment that will provide constructive opportunities and positive motivation to learner's efforts in learning English in second language context:

- Transforming the whole class into Heterogeneous groups
- Encouraging meaningful interactions and Competitions
- Promoting self-directed learning
- Designing right activities for different language elements
- Integrating all language skills (LSRW) in all activities
- Developing global understanding

Transforming the Whole Class into Heterogeneous Groups

Dividing the whole class into groups can promote cooperative learning situation and can help students come out of their inhibitions and offer their equal share to make their group win over other groups. The groups should be heterogeneous i.e. all the groups should have members of different levels of linguistic competency so that there is a fair game and all fluent students or all shy students do not fall in the same group. For a successful cooperative learning to take place, there should be an accepted common goal on which the group is rewarded for its efforts. There has to be a sense of individual accountability in the group so that each member participates equally in the tasks. The groups can be asked to design their own Group names, Slogans and mottos that would give them an extra boost to collaborate in order to win. By dint of this

division each member of the group influences the others. From a sense of shared accomplishment, mutual pride in cooperative work, and the attachment that results from joint efforts give rise to compassionate and committed friendships among the group members and they do not hesitate in learning from each other.

Encouraging Meaningful Interactions and Competitions

Once the groups are divided, the teacher has the task of providing the groups with opportunities to fall into meaningful interactions. Each lesson plan in the curriculum can be designed in an innovative manner so as to facilitate such interactions. Sometimes even some casual gossips can be picked up to trigger some meaningful interactions later. For instance a gossip on the latest blockbuster can turn into expression of individual criticism of the movie later and can create an opportunity for each member of the group to interact and contribute meaningfully to the group task. This can also turn out to be an effective way of making shy students talk in English in the classroom. Similarly developing a plot like role plays where students feel the urge to express appropriately language functions such as appreciating, requesting, congratulating, making an apology, criticizing, encouraging, and promising can be of great help to encourage less fluent students to feel inspired to talk.

Promoting Self-Directed Learning

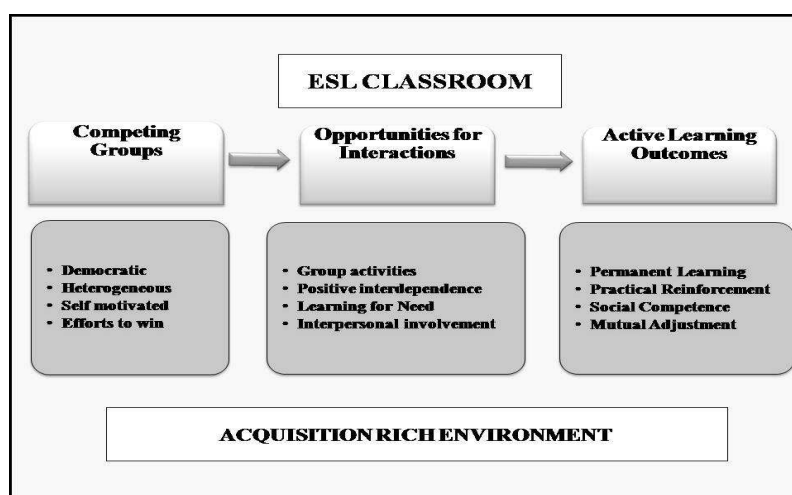


Figure 1: Proposed Model of Acquisition Rich ESL Classroom

A democratic, learner-centered, learner-governed classroom environment can yield far more unexpected wonderful results as compared to the conventional design. When learners explore knowledge, with their own desire, in their own way, at their own directions, and above all with the motivation to win, they produce superb results. For example, a teacher telling the students the meaning of hard words might not always result into students adopting the word into their active vocabulary, as it was an information forced from outside, but providing the groups with a dictionary and conducting a competition between them for first finding the meanings, and later putting them into meaningful sentences could bring the desired results.

This can be applicable to any level and any compartment of language acquisition without any doubt- be it the class for developing the understanding of linguistic aesthetics through poetry, or for developing syntactical and lexical understanding through grammar. When the learners acquire language after struggling for it at their own will, it is permanent.

Designing Right Activities for Different Language Elements

There can be many activities, depending upon the teacher's plausibility, like Playing Targeted Games, Self Initiating, Just a Minute, Group Assignments etc., that might control a powerful language classroom instruction. There is Variety of already existing activities that can be further modified to suit the teaching goals. One such example for the same can be as under:

Teaching the Types of Sentences: Assertive, Imperative and Interrogative

The teacher can play a three-step game with the groups:

Step 1: For Assertive Sentences

The Teacher first explains the grammatical structure of an assertive sentence to the class. One of the group members comes out in turn and picks a slip from a bowl. The slip has a word written on it. He then speaks four-to-five assertive sentence clues about the word (he cannot speak the word). The remaining group members then guess the word.

The groups are awarded with marks on two grounds:

- The correct guess of the word and
- The grammatical correctness of the sentence

For Example

Table 1: Dialogue for Assertive Sentence

Team - Sharks	
Roy - It is a small nocturnal animal - It is generally found in homes - It loves cheese - Cats prey upon it	Team Guess It is a MOUSE
Teacher – Correct Answer, 5 points to Sharks	

Step 2: For Imperative Sentences

The Teacher now explains the grammatical structure of an imperative sentence to the class. One of the group members then is asked to come to the board. He stands facing the board, with a board marker and a duster, and freezes there (he cannot turn around to face his team-mates and he cannot speak). The other members are then given a picture (some geometrical drawing etc.). They collaborate to synchronize their thoughts and bring into line the different steps involved in the drawing. Once they have developed the instruction plan, they in turn give instructions (imperative sentences) to their team mate at the drawing board- who cannot see them or talk to them for clarifying his doubts- in a way that their team-mate can produce the same diagram on the board. The diagram thus drawn is now compared to the one given to the team.

The marks are awarded on two grounds

- Portion of the drawing successfully reproduced
- The grammatical correctness of the instructions

Example

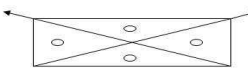


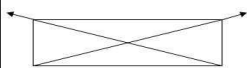
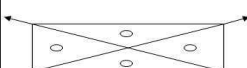
<u>Team - Eagles</u>	
Drawing given	Member at the drawing board
	
Team member 1 – Draw a rectangle.	
Team member 2 – Now draw its two diagonals.	
Team member 3 – extend both the diagonals upwards ending in arrows.	
Team member 4 – Draw small circles in each triangle dividing the rectangle.	
Teacher – Correct Answer, 4 points to Eagles	

Figure 2: Instructions (Use of Imperative Sentences)

Step – 3 for Interrogative Sentences

For achieving mastery in this type of sentence the groups are asked to write a word (some proper noun) on a slip and hand it over to the teacher. Then one group interrogates the other group to probe into the information related to the word the other group has written and finally, based on the responses, the team guesses the word.

The marks at this step are awarded on two grounds:

- Correctness of the guess
- Grammatical correctness of the questions

Integrating All Language Skills in Activities

All activities of the ESL class room must aim at engaging all aspects of human communicative capacities: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing as well as integrating the Verbal and Nonverbal aspects – facial expression, gestures, tone and other paralinguistic aspects in support of second language learning.

In the proposed model, the learning can be initiated with any of the skills depending upon the lesson in hand. For instance, if the task is that of learning a poem, the class procedure can be one as under:

- Beginning with a group reading of the poem and related text (**Reading skills**)
- Listening an audio of the poem (**Listening skills**)
- Practicing pronunciation (**Individual Speaking skills**)
- Group discussion and Group presentations on the theme (**Group Speaking skills**)
- Writing assignments on personal interpretation of the poem (**Writing skills**)

Developing Global Understanding

Language by its definition is a medium developed for the purpose of exchanging ideas feelings and for fulfilling

other social needs of man. It therefore varies from place to place depending upon the social set up and community needs. It is not at all an independent entity as it depends entirely on the social frame of reference. Thus learning a language requires the understanding of the culture of the place where it originates from. Some activities that can promote the global understanding among the language learners are:

- The use of relevant audio tapes or videos prepared in the native land of the language can help the learners a great deal in understanding cultural aspects of language.
- Watching English movies and listening English songs can also acquaint the learners with the global language culture.
- The use of Language Laboratory can also be a great help in providing facilities to the learners to rehearse the use of Global English.

Role of the Teacher

Teacher's role in the classroom is of supreme importance, as it is pivotal to the design in which the classroom environment evolves. Furthermore, teacher's behavior also decides the role to be adopted by the learners in the classroom. The proposed TESL Methodology entails the teacher's role of a facilitator. In order to create and maximize language acquisition opportunities he/she has to adopt many sub-roles like supervisor of student's learning, the administrator of the classroom, a counselor for the learners, a prompter, a resource person and often, a co-communicator with the learners.

Confines

There may be certain apprehensions in practicing the above proposition, especially in the context of Indian education system that is strictly syllabus- and textbook-oriented and examination-driven. In addition, the learners and teachers might not consent for such inventive function in attitudinal terms. However, this can be surmounted by orienting the learners and the teachers towards the benefits of system. However, with this "renovation" of the language learning process, while considering the innovative roles of both teachers and learners in the language classroom, it must be considered that it does not clash with the traditional values and surmise of the teacher and learner regarding the code of conduct in the language classroom, particularly in a country like India.

CONCLUSIONS

In the above proposition the teacher is expected to relinquish some of his or her authority over the teaching-learning process and to allow the learner to have greater say in establishing the course of language acquisition.

Through the above methodology there are increased chances of better language acquisition as under such situations, learners are inclined to work together, endorse each other's success, form logical impressions of each other's capability, give accurate feedback and try to help each other develop. The democratic classroom setting encourages the shy students get rid of all inhibitions that form the major barriers in second language acquisition, particularly the spoken aspect, and play active role in all activities of learning. Since this model proposes subconscious learning that takes place without forced efforts, the learning experience grows far beyond the conventional monotonous classroom and the learner waits for the class eagerly.

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